

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

*In the Name of Allah,
the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful*

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Dedicated to

My Parents,
Sheikh Hadayat Ullah
& Khalida,
My Wife
Moheny & My Sons
Shehryar, Taimour,
and Arsalan.

CONTENTS

The Genius of Muhammad ﷺ	9
Preface.....	14
Strategies pursued by Muhammad ﷺ	33
Personality Strengths	36
1. Independence of thought and action	42
2. Al-sadiq ("the truthful one") and Al-ameen	
("the trustworthy one")	52
3. Humility and kindness	69
4. Self-preservation instinct	90
5. Perseverance and long-term perspective.....	109
6. Proactive aggressive approach to events.....	124
Interactive Strategies.....	134
1. Understanding of human nature	
and human resource management.....	135
2. Awareness of political	
landscape and personalities WW	161
3. Choosing a life of poverty in Madina	189

4. Effective uses of pledges,	
agreements, and treaties	203
5. Consultation with companions	
and acceptance of sound advice	248
6. Affecting change through communication.....	261
7. Reward loyalty and punish treachery	295
8. Development of followers	
into leaders of the Islamic state.....	309
9. Muhammad's ﷺ marriages and	
household management.....	320
Diplomatic and Military Strategies.....	335
1. Understanding of balance of	
power considerations	338
2. Effective use of intelligence networks	350
3. Projection of power through increasing	
size of his circle of influence	358
4. Attack the nerve centre of	
the enemy to obtain maximum leverage	366
Military Strategies.....	371
1. Control Over "media"	392
2. Capture of Makkah	400

3. Development of code of conduct to be followed during war	416
4. Versatile and opportunistic approach to martial tactics	430
5. Practical wisdom during battle.....	456
6. An abridged biography of the Prophet.....	484
Muhammad's ﷺ life in Makkah before revelation (571 AD – 610 AD).....	491
Muhammad's ﷺ life in Makkah after revelation (610 AD – 622 AD)	494
Muhammad's ﷺ life in Madina (622 AD-632 AD) ..	501
Exhibits and maps	514
Bibliography	526
Footnote	533



THE GENIUS OF MUHAMMAD

ﷺ

• The Quran:

"We have indeed, in the Messenger of God, a good example of conduct for anyone whose hope is in God and the Final Day."¹

• Karen Armstrong:

If we could view Muhammad ﷺ as we do any other important historical figure we would surely consider him to be one of the greatest geniuses the world has ever known. To create a literary masterpiece, to found a major religion and a new world power are not ordinary achievements. But to appreciate his genius to the full, we must examine the society into which he was born and the forces with which he contended. When he descended from Mount Hira to bring the Word of God to the Arabs, Muhammad ﷺ was about to attempt the impossible.²

- W. Montgomery Watt:

The more one reflects on the history of Muhammad ﷺ and of early Islam, the more one is amazed at the vastness of his achievement. Circumstances presented him with an opportunity such as few men have had, but the man was fully matched with the hour. Had it not been for his gifts as seer, statesman, and administrator and, behind these, his trust in God and firm belief that God had sent him, a notable chapter in the history of mankind would have remained unwritten.³

- Maxime Rodinson:

In the strange atmosphere of Makkah, on the edge of the magnificent civilized world of the great powers, just then engaged in an apocalyptic struggle, the faith was growing up which was later to overflow into the world at large and endeavour to mould it. All this was taking place within the brain of a single man, but stirring within it were the reflected problems of a whole world; and the historical conditions were such that the results of all this mental activity were calculated to shake Arabia and beyond.⁴

- Tor Andrae:

A genuine prophet is one who really has a message to deliver, one in whose soul some of the great questions of his age have stimulated

a restlessness which compels him to speak, the natural and inevitable expression of a strong lasting conviction and a genuine passion.⁵

- M. K. Gandhi:

I become more than ever convinced that it was not the sword that won a place for Islam in those days. It was the rigid simplicity, the utter self-effacement of the Prophet, the scrupulous regard for pledges, his intense devotion to his friends and followers and his intrepidity, his fearlessness, his absolute trust in God and in his own mission. These and not the sword carried everything before them and surmounted every obstacle.⁶

- H. G. Wells:

Islam prevailed because it was the best social and political order the times could offer. It prevailed because everywhere it found politically apathetic peoples, robbed, oppressed, bullied, uneducated and unorganised and it found selfish and unsound governments out of touch with any people at all. It was the broadest, freshest and cleanest political idea that had yet come into actual activity in the world and it offered better terms than any other to the mass of mankind.⁷

- Winwood Reade:

Instead of repining that Mahomet [sic] did no more, we have reason to be astonished that he

Preface

Ever since I began my specialization in Religion and History at Columbia University in 1983, I have been fascinated by the personality and achievements of the Prophet of Islam, Muhammad ﷺ. For the last thirty years, I have reviewed biographies on the Prophet from Muslim writers as well as Western scholars. I have personally been impressed by the Prophet's genius, managerial sophistication, leadership capabilities and strategic brilliance.

Most of the literature I have reviewed to date does not fully address these aspects of the Prophet's achievements. Most writing by Muslim scholars on the Prophet's life and achievements, understandably, adds devotional aspects and spiritual language. However, this undermines the quality of the research in the eyes of the Western students of Islam. Many Western writers, on the other hand, are skeptical of the Islamic claim to be

the final and definitive monotheistic religious tradition after Judaism and Christianity, which puts Muslim students on a defensive any time a particular issue is debated out of context of the ultimate veracity of Islam. Other Western writers are not deferential towards Islam and the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and underplay his and Islam's achievements. Many Western scholars consider Muhammad ﷺ a controversial historical figure – a number of them think of him as a charlatan and a deceitful, lusty character.¹² However, several Western writers such as W. Montgomery Watt, Martin Lings, Karen Armstrong, and Barnaby Rogerson have made valuable and, on the whole, balanced contributions to developing an understanding of the Prophet's life and achievements.

There is a fundamental difference of opinion about the Prophet's source of inspiration. It is a basic tenet of Islam that the Prophet received divine guidance from God that inspired him and guided him throughout his life. Muslims believe that the Quran, the revelation of which took twenty-three years to complete, is the word of God and that the Prophet's achievements are not his personal accomplishments. Rather, they constitute the realization of a divine plan. On the other hand, Western scholars, who do not believe in Islam, maintain that Muhammad ﷺ, in essence, was the right man at the right place at the right time. They attribute great sagacity to him in analyzing the state-of-affairs

4 provides a summary chronology of Muhammad ﷺ's life history for quick reference.

I have received valuable comments from many friends, writers and scholars for which I thank them. I seek forgiveness for any inadvertent mistakes in the text.

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May 15, 2013

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CHAPTER 1

STRATEGIES PURSUED BY MUHAMMAD ﷺ

ﷺ

[Muhammad ﷺ (April 22, 571 AD – June 8, 632 AD)]

The Prophet of Islam, was the most brilliant strategist the world has seen.

Many western scholars consider him the *most* influential man in world history because of the impact he has had on billions of people in the last fourteen hundred years. Today, more than one and a half billion people (or one out of six living human beings) claim to follow in his foot-steps. Many demographers calculate that Islam will become's the world's largest religion by 2050.

The world has seen many brilliant strategists in the last roughly 2,500 years of recorded history. Alexander

and Julius Caesar were brilliant military strategists and conquerors. Sun Tzu and Von Clausewitz were brilliant military strategists. Aristotle and Plato were brilliant intellectual theorists. Augustus Caesar, Machiavelli and Gandhi were brilliant administrative and political strategists. Count Richelieu and Henry Kissinger were considered brilliant diplomatic strategists. Jack Welch and Steve Jobs are generally considered brilliant business strategists. Warren Buffet is considered an unmatched financial strategist.²⁰ However, the Prophet of Islam operated in a very wide realm of strategy. His influence has been profound on *all* aspects of human existence: personal, social, religious, spiritual, intellectual, political, diplomatic, military, administrative and commercial. No other single strategist in world history continues to have a dramatic influence on the total gamut of human existence on such a large scale.

The Prophet's field of activity ranged far and wide. Not only did he change the world-view of a people, he practically moulded a nation out of a disparate group of warring tribes to the extent that more than one and a half billion Muslims now live all over the world. Muhammad ﷺ did not achieve his success through any miraculous powers. He himself stated many times that he was an ordinary human being. If he had employed miraculous powers to achieve his goals, his life would not have been considered *uswah hasanah* ("the beautiful example") by Muslims through centuries. Unless the very human aspect of cause and effect is put before the common man

- who does not and cannot rely on miracles- he will not find the conduct of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ a worthy and a practical example to imitate in his daily struggle for existence.²¹

This essay is specifically focused on the brilliance of the Prophet as a strategist. The Webster New Universal Unabridged Dictionary defines strategy as "a plan, method or series of maneuvers or stratagems for obtaining a specific goal or result". A stratagem can be defined as a plan or scheme devised or used to attain a goal or to gain an advantage over an adversary. Brilliant is defined by the same dictionary as "having or showing great intelligence, talent or quality". In the specific context of this paper, I define strategy as "the voluntary and consistent pursuit by Muhammad ﷺ of a coherent plan of action aimed at the propagation of Islam in Arabia and beyond."

It is important for the purpose of this study to distinguish between what the Prophet received as revelations and what he informed his companions to be his own personal views. The Prophet was always very particular about differentiating between the two. Our concern in this study is with *voluntary* and consistent actions of the Prophet that help explain his dramatic success. Naturally, it is also a purpose of this study to glean what the average reader can 'take home' from a study of the Prophet's life. The next section discusses the elements of the Prophet's strategy in detail.

2. *Al-Sadiq* ("The Truthful One") and *Al-Ameen* ("The Trustworthy One")

One can argue that these two attributes were his personality traits and not strategies he pursued on a conscious level. The possibility that the young Muhammad ﷺ would have the sagacity to evaluate his immediate environment and decide on a life path that would make him a model of moral rectitude is actually quite real. One is reminded of Winston Churchill who, when put in charge of the British war effort during World War II, remarked that all of his life had prepared him for that one moment.

One wonders whether the young Muhammad ﷺ also prepared all of his life for his leading the Arabs into a new faith and into a new, united, enlightened and prosperous future. In a positive sense, he capitalized on this moral rectitude to lead and to win the accolades even from his sworn enemies on matters of principle and justice. Truthfulness and trustworthiness can be considered the two minimum foundations of a truly great personality. A great personality is one which is respected by friends and foes alike. In matters of personal integrity and trustworthiness, Muhammad ﷺ shines as a world leader. He was most particular about telling the truth,

keeping his promises and commitments and honouring the trust reposed in him by others – regardless whether they were Muslims or non-Muslims. Abu Hurairah reported the Prophet as having said: "There are three signs of a hypocrite: When he speaks, he lies; when he makes a promise, he breaks it; and when he is trusted, he betrays the trust."³⁷ Another saying of the Prophet reported by Abu Bakrah Nufai bin Al-Harith shows his strong distaste for lies and misstatements: "...I warn you against giving forged statement and a false testimony; I warn you against giving forged statement and a false testimony." Abu Bakrah states that "Allah's Messenger kept on repeating that warning till we wished he would stop."³⁸

The strength of Muhammad's character, his resoluteness and his truthfulness are continuously demonstrated by his life history. In this section, we have highlighted just a few incidents from his life. Muhammad ﷺ had been, on a few occasions, chosen to serve as a *Hakim* in small disputes.³⁹ *Hakim* is a function entrusted to a Leading and highly respected member of Arab society who is entrusted with functioning as an arbitrator to settle disputes between members of the community.

- The Black Stone
 (Hajre Aswad) Controversy

A brilliant example of Muhammad's equanimity comes to us from his resolution of the Black Stone

5. Consultation with Companions and Acceptance of Sound Advice

A review of the Prophet's life shows that he did not consider himself the holder of all knowledge and was quite ready and often eager to seek advice from others. Not only was he pro-active in seeking advice, he often acted upon such advice. This shows his ability to harness the capabilities of his companions and use their collective wisdom for the promotion of Islam. His brilliance lay in weighing the different pieces of advice and choosing the most appropriate course of action. Muhammad ﷺ leveraged the competencies of his companions. He sought advice from them and adopted a course of action that generally reflected the best advice.

The Prophet encouraged his companions to make a distinction between his role as a Prophet and a Messenger and his role as a human being. Muhammad ﷺ encouraged his companions to come forward and present their views on worldly matters unrelated to his role as a Messenger. The companions made a distinction between Revelations the Prophet received, which they obeyed without a second thought, and the opinions

of Muhammad ﷺ the man, which could be debated, improved on, or even rejected outright (which was the case during the deliberations leading up to the Battle of Uhud, for instance). The Messenger's authority in human affairs was neither autocratic nor unrestricted; he allowed his companions a substantial role in consultation, and his teachings developed the conditions for acquiring those critical and creative faculties. The Prophet gave his companions, women and men alike, the means and confidence to be autonomous, to dare to address and contradict him without his ever considering it a lack of respect for his status. Through his attitude, he showed them his deep respect for their intelligence and for their heart: as for them, they loved their Prophet, their leader, for this attention, this availability, and this demand to use their abilities to the fullest.²⁷⁸

In matters of religious teaching and instruction, Muhammad ﷺ was himself the guide and interpreter of the Quran for his companions. However, in day-to-day life decisions, martial strategies, diplomatic interactions, Muhammad ﷺ took advice from a council of close friends. This group of advisers expanded dramatically in the Madina period because of large-scale conversions to Islam and because many Arab noblemen came from far-off lands to convert to Islam and spent time with Muhammad ﷺ. Muhammad's ﷺ active interest in obtaining advice from others meant that he could obtain different points-of-view and weigh them against

9. Muhammad's ﷺ Marriages and Household Management

Muhammad's ﷺ marriages have been a source of constant debate among scholars and historians. At one end are Western writers many of whom have painted the Prophet as a voluptuary who courted and enjoyed female companionship. In fact, the large number of the Prophet's marriages (which were eleven, by most counts) is interpreted by many Western critics as indication that the Prophet was above the law himself since ordinary Muslims are restricted to a maximum of four marriages. In addition, many historians make Muhammad ﷺ into a colourful character who was given to carnal pleasures of life.

Several European historians and biographers of the Prophet point to Surah Al-Ahzab of the Quran which seems to award the Prophet carte blanche in his marital relations: "We have made lawful to you ... women who give themselves to you and whom you wished to take in marriage. This privilege is yours alone, being granted to no other believer...You may put off any of your wives you please and take to bed any of them you please" [The Quran, 33:50]. Quite a few Muslim historians have also commented on his virility which, for them, is only a sign

of the Prophet being a perfect man.

Exhibit 9 provides summary information on the Prophet's marriages and provides the names of his wives, their approximate ages at marriage (where this writer was able to gather this information) and the approximate dates of marriage.

- First wife: Khadijah bint Khuwailid – 595 A

Khadijah bint Khuwailid was the Prophet's first wife. Tradition reports that she was forty years old when she married Muhammad ﷺ in 595 AD. At this time, Muhammad ﷺ was only twenty-five years old. They both remained married till her death in 619 AD. The firstborn, a boy named Qasim, lived only two years; then came Zainab, Ruqayyah, Umme Kulthoom, Fatima and at last Abdullah, who also died before the age of two.³⁵² Muhammad ﷺ remained in a monogamous marriage relationship with Khadijah for twenty-four years. The Prophet did not marry any other woman during Khadijah's life-time although this was quite a common custom in Arabia at that time. It is also worth noting that Muhammad ﷺ made no use of Khadijah's wealth (other than to give alms to the poor) and maintained his business as a merchant and trader.³⁵³

- Second wife: Sauda bint Zamaa – 619 AD

His second wife, Sauda, was nearing forty when he married her to provide a mother for his four daughters who were very young at that time. Khadijah had died leaving Muhammad ﷺ to care for their very young

CHAPTER 4

AN ABRIDGED
BIOGRAPHY OF
THE PROPHET

This section is not meant to provide a comprehensive biography of Muhammad ﷺ. There are several excellent biographies of the Prophet available in bookstores that are also mentioned in the bibliography. This section merely provides a brief outline of the Prophet's life history. The goal is to introduce the newcomer to the Prophet's life story so that he can develop a mental framework for appreciating the Prophet's various strategies discussed in the earlier sections.

- The Setting

The immediate environment of Arabia at the time of Muhammad ﷺ.

At the time of Muhammad ﷺ in the seventh century AD, the Arab peninsula was truly a backwater. The vast Arabian Desert held no attraction for the Byzantine and Persian super-powers that existed and fought each other at the northern extremes of the Arab peninsula. Arabia held no attraction for the world powers who thought of the Arabs as uncivilized barbarians.

Arabia, at this time, was considered a God-less region and none of the more advanced religions, which were associated with modernity and progress, had managed to penetrate the area. The Arabs knew very well that the great powers of Persia and Byzantium were ready to use both faiths as a means of imperial control. The Arabs felt inferior, both religiously and politically. Until they managed to create a united Bedouin state and take their destiny into their own hands, they would still be vulnerable to exploitation and could even lose their independence, like the Arabs of the south. Since they realized that they must not allow themselves to be exploited by the great powers, so in order to avoid the fate of the kingdom of the South they remained strictly neutral in the struggle between Persia and Byzantium.

- Religious Influences from Abroad

The Arabian Peninsula housed several Jewish tribes and Christian settlements so they were generally familiar with concepts of monotheism. This was quite a contrast to their own multitude of gods and deities. The

- The Prophet Departs for Madina (622 AD)

The Prophet first made sure that his followers left Makkah for Yathrib. He made them leave Makkah in small groups (and often in the night) so that their departure was not detected by the Quraish. Finally, when Muhammad ﷺ discovered that a band of the Quraish was planning to kill him in his sleep, he left Makkah in the middle of the night. He was accompanied by his closest friend and companion, Abu Bakr. They first headed towards Taif which was in the opposite direction from Madina. This helped elude their pursuers who were motivated by the prize of one hundred camels announced by the Quraish for Muhammad's capture. Muhammad ﷺ and Abu Bakr reached the outskirts of Yathrib (which was later named *Madina-tul-Nabi*, or the city of the Prophet, later abbreviated Madina) on September 24, 622 AD which is considered the first day of the Hijra calendar used by Muslims to mark this important turning point in Islamic history.



Muhammad's ﷺ Life in Madina

(622 AD – 632 AD)

In Madina, Muhammad ﷺ was by no means an undisputed ruler, at least in the early years. However, by the time he died in 632 AD, Muhammad ﷺ had become the undisputed leader of all of Arabia. In Makkah, Muhammad ﷺ was the inspired head of a religious sect; in Madina, he transformed the little Muslim movement into an incipient world religion.

Muhammad's first act in Madina was the construction of a mosque which was to serve many purposes. A part of the mosque served as his private residence while the mosque itself was a prayer hall, a meeting place, a conference room and a classroom.

Muhammad ﷺ then created a bond of brotherhood between the impoverished immigrants who had arrived penniless from Makkah (the *Muhajireen*) and their brethren in faith, the *Ansaar*. He then had drafted a Constitution of Madina (also known as the